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Review Article

Photosynthetic reaction center-based biophotovoltaics

Vincent M. Friebe and Raoul N. Frese*



Photosynthesis is the principal solar energy conversion process on Earth, but is low in overall efficiency due to numerous steps necessary to fix carbon. Tapping into the high-efficiency components which drive photosynthesis, known as reaction centers, offers a route to efficiently capture solar energy. This may be achieved by direct integration of reaction centers onto electrode materials in order to extract the high potential electrons and produce electricity or fuels. This review describes the various strategies and current benchmark configurations of Photosystem-I, Photosystem-II and bacterial reaction center-based biophotoelectrodes.

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Photosynthesis for device application

Solar energy is the most abundant energy source, striking Earth's surface at a rate of $\sim 120,000$ TW [1,2]. Photosynthesis, the principal solar energy conversion process on the planet, captures and stores solar energy as biomass at a rate of ~ 120 TW, or more than six times our current rate of energy consumption (~ 18 TW) [1,2]. While utilizing this biomass to meet our energy demands seems attractive, a number of challenges render this economically and environmentally unfeasible [3,4]. In large part, this is due to the low efficiency in which solar energy is converted into biomass, with crop plants obtaining only a few percent efficiency at best [3,5].

Photosynthesis begins with the absorption of light by a pigment-protein complex, forming excitation energy which drives primary charge separation in the photochem-

ical reaction center (RC) (Figure 1). This sets in motion a series of down-hill redox reactions which produce ATP and NADPH. This chemical potential energy is used in subsequent enzyme reactions to fix CO_2 in the form of carbohydrates. Losses in power conversion efficiency occur at each of these steps, particularly after intra-protein charge separation in the RC [6], driving the interest to the extract high potential electrons directly from the RC.

While photosynthesis occurs in species separated by billions of years of evolution: bacteria, algae and plants, the general functional and structural layout of their RCs are very similar. An RC consists of a protein scaffold that binds chromophores such as chlorophylls and carotenoids, which act as functional light-harvesting or electron transfer components. Light-driven charge separation is initiated at a specific group of chlorophyll-like molecules named the special pair (indicated by P and wavelength of maximum absorption) and the electron is transferred within a few picoseconds to a nearby pheophytin molecule [7]. Some evolutionary adjustments have been made regarding the transition energy and the redox potentials of the photocatalytic sites, for example, PS-II of plants and green algae is sufficiently oxidizing enough to extract electrons from water. As a result of these adjustments, the intraprotein power conversion efficiencies (η_{RC}) of bacterial RCs (BRC), photosystem-I and photosystem-II (PS-I and PS-II) are 32%, 57%, and 59%, respectively. These are calculated from the values in Table 1 using the following equation:

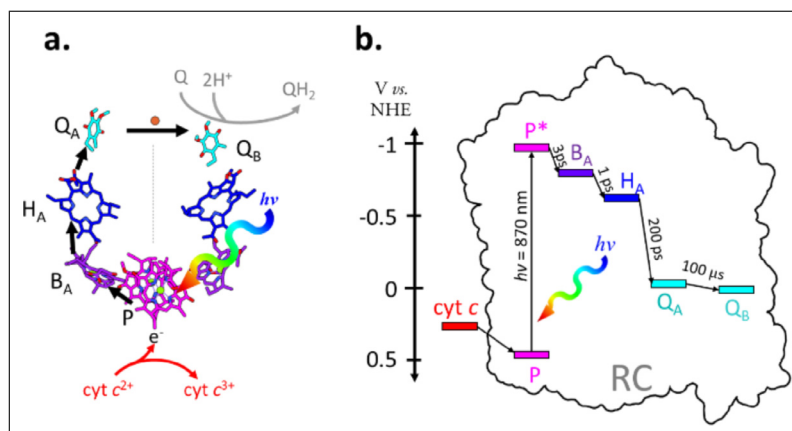
$$\eta_{RC} = \frac{T}{P^*}$$

where T is the terminal cofactor energy relative to the special pair ground state (Δ eV vs. P) and P^* is the special pair HOMO–LUMO gap (Δ eV). This calculation assumes the quantum efficiency of charge separation is 100%.

All types of RCs in nature are surrounded by species-specific light-harvesting complexes (LHC's) that absorb light and transfer excited state energy towards the RC. Note that RC–LHC systems are generally indicated with names to reflect the type of LHC; such as RC–LH1 for bacterial species. For simplicity, we generally use the abbreviation RC in the text for all preparations.

Since the stimulating light is typically not a single wavelength, but rather the solar spectrum above the band gap, spectral losses are taken into account by the ultimate

Figure 1



The energetics and mechanism of unidirectional charge separation in the bacterial reaction center. a) The cofactors within the RC involved in charge separation with only those of the A-branch listed. The special pair (P) in magenta, bacteriochlorophyll (B_A) in purple, bacteriopheophytin (H_A) in blue and ubiquinones (Q_A) and (Q_B) in cyan. External electron donors and acceptors cytochrome c and ubiquinone are shown in red and gray arrows, respectively. The rotational axis of symmetry is shown in dotted lines b) electron transfer with formal potentials of the cofactors as well as electron transfer lifetimes. Structural outline of the BRC protein complex indicated by the black outline, height is approximately 6 nm.

Table 1

Estimated redox midpoint potentials (E_m) and ultimate efficiencies.

Reaction center <i>R. sph.</i>	E_m (mV vs. NHE)	HOMO–LUMO gap (Δ eV vs. P)	Ultimate efficiency (%)
P870 ⁺ /P870	+450 mV [8]	–	–
P870*	–975 mV ^a	1.43 eV	45.4% ^b
Q_B/Q_B^-	–10 mV [9,10]	0.46 eV	14.6%
Photosystem I			
P700 ⁺ /P700	+450 mV [11]	–	–
P700*	–1320 mV [11]	1.77 eV	36.2%
F_B/F_B^-	–560 mV [12]	1.01 eV	20.7%
Photosystem II			
P680 ⁺ /P680	+1125 mV	–	–
P680*	–705 mV [13]	1.82 eV	34.6%
Q_B/Q_B^-	+40 mV [14]	1.08 eV	20.4%
Silicon		1.11 eV	48.6%

^a Estimated using E_m P870⁺/P870 –1.425 V (870 nm = 1.425 eV).

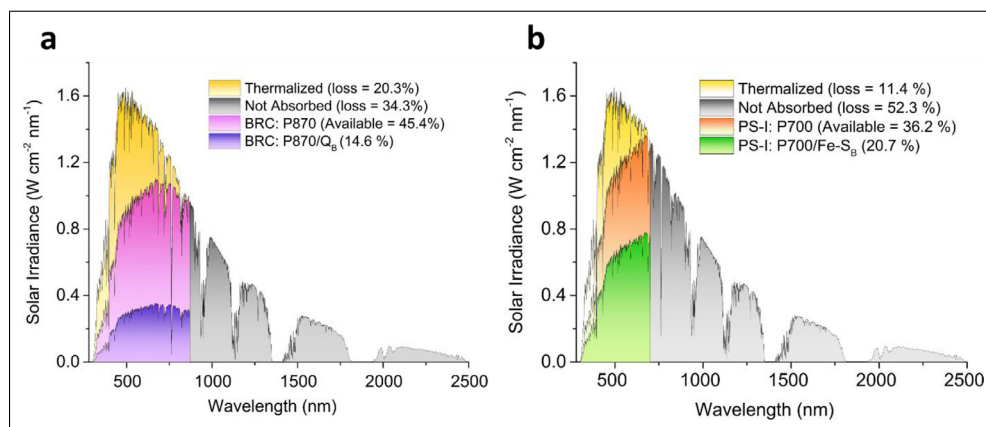
efficiency (η_U) depicted in Figure 2 for BRCs and PS-I [15]. The η_U is part of the Shockley Queisser method devised to calculate the limits of solar energy conversion and is defined as the maximum power conversion efficiency of a single junction (single photosystem) material from spectral losses. It assumes that the quantum efficiency is one at all wavelengths above the band gap, photons with higher energy relax down to the band gap energy, the only mechanism of loss is radiative recombination, and that photons below the band gap are not absorbed [15]. It may be calculated as a function of the band gap frequency (ν_g , s^{–1})

using the following equation:

$$\eta_U(\nu_g) = \frac{h \nu_g N_p}{P_{in}}$$

where h is Planck's constant (6.626×10^{-34} J s), N_p is the number of incident photons per defined area above the band gap energy, and P_{in} is the cumulative solar irradiance ($W m^{-2}$) [16]. Using the AM 1.5 G solar irradiance and the BRC P870 band gap of 1.43 eV we determined the $\eta_{BRC} = 45.4\%$. To extend the calculation to the BRC

Figure 2



Reaction center ultimate efficiencies. *R. sphaeroides* BRC and Photosystem-I efficiency losses from transmission (grey), thermalization (yellow), with available remaining energy at the special pair (magenta and orange) and after charge separation (purple and green). Efficiencies and losses are indicated in parentheses in the legend and corresponding colored areas are to scale. PS-II is not shown here but has similar ultimate efficiencies to PS-I (see Table 1).

terminal cofactor (Q_B) the η_U (45.4%) is multiplied by the η_{RC} (32%) to obtain a 14.6% ultimate efficiency after charge separation (Q_B^-/P^+). The η_U calculation is extended to reveal PS-I and PS-II have a η_U of 20.7% and 20.6% after charge separation (Table 1). Our η_U calculations are in good agreement with Mirvakili *et al.* [17] but differ slightly due to our use of the AM 1.5 G solar irradiance spectrum rather than a 6000 K blackbody irradiance and variations in the reported cofactor redox potentials [9,10].

By integrating the area of the solar irradiance curve below the band gap of the RC, we calculated that 34% and 52% of solar irradiation is not absorbed by BRCs and PS-I complexes, respectively (Figure 2, gray). Of the fraction absorbed, 20.3% is lost as heat due to thermal relaxation of the excitation energy down to the fixed-band gap energy of P870 in BRCs, while only 11.4% is lost in PS-I due to the larger band gap (Figure 2, yellow). In retrospect, an optimal RC tuned to the solar irradiance would have a larger intraprotein potential energy, similar to PS-I, but a larger spectral range extending further into the infrared, similar to the BRC.

Progress and strategies in biophotovoltaics

Incorporating the high power conversion efficiencies of RCs into devices has gained a significant amount of interest in recent years [18,19]. This has resulted in significant improvement in biophotovoltaic performances, with densities in the microampere per cm^{-2} range becoming the norm [20^{••}–23[•]] and some even reaching the milliampere range [24[•],25]. Key developments in biophotovoltaic progress utilizing all types of RCs are depicted in Figure 3. Progress is measured in photocurrents densities (J_{photo}) rather than power conversion efficiencies, as

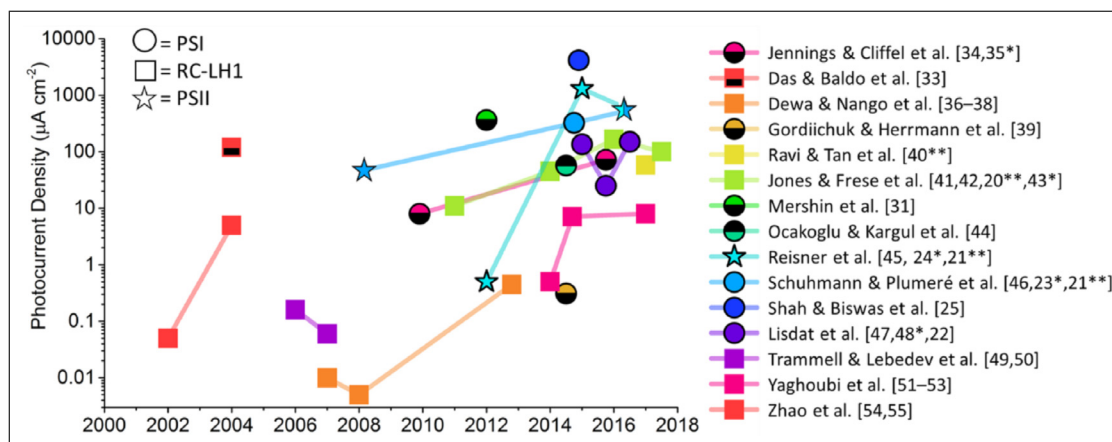
most of the reported values are from half-cell configurations with an applied bias potential. The various methodologies used to immobilize RCs on electrodes have been recently reviewed for BRCs [18], PS-I [26], PS-II in [27], and collectively for all RCs types [19,28]. A recent book chapter by Plumeré and Nowaczyk provides an excellent guideline for biophotovoltaics and is indispensable for navigating the following text [29[•]].

Protein immobilization

Perhaps the most common and simple method to construct biophotovoltaics is electrode immersion in a solution containing the solubilized RCs. Modulation of the substrate composition, architecture, or surface chemistry is typically employed to facilitate protein-electrode adsorption, as it is more accessible than modulating the complex protein surface itself. Nevertheless, there are also several instances of engineering the RC itself for electrode binding. For example, PS-I has been engineered to bind metal oxides [30,31], and histidine-tags have been added on both BRCs and PS-II for binding Ni-NTA functionalized electrodes [32,33].

A common method for interfacing proteins with metal electrodes is surface functionalization with a self-assembled monolayer (SAM). A SAM typically consists of an alkanethiol on gold [32] and silver [56] electrodes, or silanes and phosphonates on indium tin oxide (ITO) [36,45]. Numerous groups including Kong *et al.* [54], Nango *et al.* [37], and Trammell & Lebedev [50] have constructed metal-SAM electrodes. Relatively low J_{photo} of tens of nanoamperes were reported due to slow heterogeneous electron transfer from the electrode to the RC. This is a result of the additional tunneling barrier imposed by both the SAM spacer (e.g. ~ 1 nm for a 6-carbon SAM)

Figure 3



Recent progress in biophotovoltaics. Achievements by various laboratories are indicated by maximum photocurrents (log scale) and year of report. PSI-based electrodes are indicated by circles, BRC-based electrodes in squares, PS-II is indicated by stars, and two-electrode power generating configurations are filled half-black. Ref. [21**] is a collaboration between the two groups indicated. References in square brackets are in chronological order consistent with data points. The references cited in this figure are [20**,21**,22,23*,24*,25], [33,34,35*,36–39,40**,41,42,43*,44–47,48*,49–55].

[37] and the protein matrix of the RC which is ~ 0.7 nm for the donor side and 2.4 nm from the ubiquinone acceptor side [49] (SI).

Long tunneling gaps may be bridged by electron relays or immobilized electron transfer mediators. This was pioneered by Lebedev *et al.* [49] with the addition of the natural RC electron donor, cytochrome *c* (cyt *c*), on a functionalized gold electrode, leading to a 40-fold increase in J_{photo} up to 160 nA cm^{-2} . Yaghoubi *et al.* [51] further improved protein loading from 4 pmol cm^{-2} to 6 pmol cm^{-2} and J_{photo} up to $\sim 500 \text{ nA cm}^{-2}$ by substituting the Ni-NTA terminated SAM for a shorter hydroxyl-terminated SAM. The tunneling barrier can be further minimized by removing the SAM entirely and directly immobilizing RCs and cyt *c* onto bare gold electrodes. This was demonstrated by Hollander *et al.* [41] who obtained a J_{photo} of $\sim 11 \text{ } \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ ($\lambda = 870 \text{ nm}$ at 100 mW cm^{-2}).

Further improvements in photocurrent can be obtained by increasing the RC packing density and controlling the RC orientation, which enables favorable electron transfer from an electrode to either the acceptor or donor side of the RC. One such technique, the Langmuir–Blodgett film deposition method, exploits the innate amphiphilic nature of certain RCs to orient the complexes donor-side-up on an air–water interface. Deposition of an oriented and densely packed BRC film on an electrode is described in Kamran *et al.* [57] and resulted in a J_{photo} of $45 \text{ } \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ ($\lambda = 880 \text{ nm}$ at 23 mW cm^{-2}). This represented a milestone for monolayer-based systems, as the internal quantum efficiency (IQE, electrons per absorbed photon) approached 32%, meaning one in every three RC excitations resulted in an electron transfer from the electrode.

The turnover over frequency (TOF) may be extrapolated from the photocurrent ($J = 45 \text{ } \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$) and protein loading ($\Gamma_{\text{RC-LH1}} = 1.1 \text{ pmol cm}^{-2}$) reported by Kamran *et al.* using the following equation:

$$TOF = \frac{J}{F \Gamma_{\text{RC-LH1}}}$$

where F is the Faraday constant ($96,485 \text{ C mol}^{-1}$). This revealed an RC-LH1 TOF of $\sim 400 \text{ e}^{-} \text{ s}^{-1}$, the highest for a BRC-based system to date [42]. The TOF is essential in revealing not only the rate but also the extent to which the RCs that are immobilized are utilized (e.g. relative to maximum turnover [29*]) and should be reported for biophotocatalysis comparison. Regardless of the high TOF reported by Kamran *et al.*, the low BRC loading lead to a correspondingly small external quantum efficiency (EQE, electrons per incident photon) of 0.28%, prompting the departure from flat surfaces to larger surface area structures for higher BRC loading discussed below.

Another strategy to orient and densely pack RCs exploits the high affinity of polyhistidines to bind Ni-NTA functionalized electrodes. However, photocurrent densities on these substrates typically reside in the nanoampere range [32,49,38], with two exceptions in the microampere range [33,58]. For a direct comparison, see the 10-fold larger photocurrent response of PS-II randomly oriented within a redox polymer on gold relative to His-tag immobilization on Ni-NTA functionalized gold [46].

For device application, large surface area electrodes are necessary to increase the RC loading and overall performance. Friebe *et al.* [20**] showed that the transition

from a planar silver substrate to a mesoporous rough silver electrode resulted in J_{photo} enhancements of approximately six fold, from $\sim 30 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ to $166 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$, and a TOF increase from 57 to $142 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ under 1-sun illumination. Similarly, Kato *et al.* [59] immobilized PS-II on mesoporous ITO increasing PS-II loading 26-fold relative to an ideal monolayer, totaling 19pmol cm^{-2} . This resulted in a J_{photo} of $\sim 1.6 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ by direct electron transfer (DET), and $22 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ by mediated electron transfer (MET) via the addition of 2,6-dimethylbenzoquinone (DCBQ) ($\lambda = 685 \text{nm}$ at 10mW cm^{-2}). Subsequent work focused on further increasing the effective surface area of the mesoporous ITO, utilizing macroporous polystyrene spacers ($0.75 \mu\text{m}$) to obtain hierarchical inverse opal mesoporous ITO electrodes. This increased the loading of PS-II up to 1020pmol cm^{-2} [24[•]] and resulted in a J_{photo} of $\sim 20 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ by DET. The addition of the mediator DCBQ boosted the peak current up to $1300 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ ($\lambda = 680 \text{nm}$ at 10mW cm^{-2}), the highest value to date for a PSII-based system. However, the reported PS-II TOF of $\sim 52 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ is only a fraction of the previously reported $500 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ on a planar Ni-NTA functionalized electrode, suggesting the photocurrent may be improved significantly [60]. Mesoporous ITO has also been used in conjunction with a cyt *c*-PSI-based system, resulting in a J_{photo} of $\sim 150 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ and a PS-I TOF of $35 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ [22]. Despite the large gains, the best EQEs have only approached 17%, indicating the majority of incident light is still not absorbed [24[•]] and that more PC loading is required.

Multi-layer assembly

One strategy to further increase the loading of RCs on electrodes includes the immobilization of multiple layers. Stieger *et al.* [48[•]] used alternating deposition of positively charged PSI-cyt *c* complexes with negatively charged DNA to obtain a J_{photo} of $25 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$, with a PS-I TOF of $21 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$. Ciesielksi *et al.* [34] used vacuum-assisted solvent evaporation to adsorb a thick multilayer film of PS-I on gold, resulting in peak photocurrent densities (J_{peak}) $\sim 8 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ which stabilized at $2 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$. Ravi *et al.* [40^{••}] employed solubilized RC-LH1 in a tandem biophotoelectrode, leading to $J_{\text{peak}} \sim 60 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ which stabilized at $\sim 9 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$. Most significantly, the work showed the potential for employing genetically modified RC-LH1 to expand the spectral range of the biophotoelectrodes. While these strategies are attractive for increasing the total loading and spectral range of RCs, the increasing EQE is typically undermined by decreasing IQE, as electron transfer to increasingly distal redox active sites becomes hampered.

One strategy to further increase the loading of RCs on electrodes includes encapsulation in a polymer hydrogel. An earlier study immobilized BRCs in an Al_2O_3 sol-gel resulting in photocurrent densities of approximately $5 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ [61]. However, photocurrents were relatively

small for the large quantity of RCs¹, because they were limited by mass transport of the soluble electron donor (sodium dithionite) through the gel and a high rate of charge recombination. These electron transfer limitations in multilayer systems may be resolved with addition of redox centers, akin to the cytochrome electron relays in monolayer configurations. Badura *et al.* [46] was one of the first to implement this strategy with RCs, by mixing PS-II in an osmium-redox hydrogel² and obtaining J_{photo} $45 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$. Kothe *et al.* [23[•]] embedded PS-I in the same osmium-redox polymer and, by exploiting pH-dependent properties of the poly(vinyl)imidazole backbone, optimized electron transfer rates through the gel to obtain a J_{photo} of $322 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ ($\lambda = 685 \text{nm}$ at 40mW cm^{-2}). Most significantly, the TOF of the PS-I was estimated to be larger than PS-I TOF *in vivo*, at $335 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ vs. $47 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ *in vivo*, which is the highest reported turnover frequency for PS-I in a biophotoelectrode to date. Satisfying the fast turnover rate while simultaneously loading multiple layers of RCs overcomes two of the long-standing bottlenecks in biophotovoltaic performance. However, the capture of the high reducing power of PS-I without loss to oxygen or other charge recombination mechanisms remains a challenge.

A particularly strong element of the redox hydrogel is the capacity to tune the reduction potential, enabling band alignment of the redox polymer to that of the RCs for higher V_{OC} . This was shown in the work of Plumeré *et al.* [62[•]] in a tandem PS-I/PS-II electrode with hydrogels that were matched to the donor and acceptor sites of the PS-I and PS-II, respectively, resulting in an increase in the V_{OC} from 90mV [63] to 372mV [62[•]].

Combining the high loading capacity of ultrahigh surface area electrodes with fast electron transfer and multi-layer connectivity of redox polymers tackles the problem of obtaining high EQE and TOF simultaneously. This has been investigated with PS-II embedded in a redox polymer on a mesoporous inverse-opal ITO electrode to obtain photocurrents via DET on the order of $410 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ and a reported TOF of $\sim 15 \text{e}^{-} \text{s}^{-1}$ PSII⁻¹ ($\lambda = 685 \text{nm}$ at 10mW cm^{-2}) [21^{••}]. The addition of the hydrogel enabled the integration of the PS-II into the host material, eliminating the drawbacks of mediated electron transfer, and resulted in a high faradaic efficiency (current to oxygen) of $85 \pm 9\%$, the highest to date. While the peak photocurrent is lower than the previously reported value of $1300 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ via MET [24[•]], DET was only $20 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ in the earlier configuration. The combination of nanostructured electrodes and redox polymers is yet to be shown with PS-I and bacterial RC-based systems and

¹ From their reported film OD of 0.05 we estimated $\Gamma_{\text{RC}} = 122 \text{pmol cm}^{-2}$.

² Osmium(byp)₂Cl modified poly(vinyl)imidazol.

represents the current benchmark of biophotocathode performance.

Solid state electrodes

The diffusion limited mass transport of the mediator bridging the gap between the cathode and anode may become the ultimate bottleneck in biophotovoltaics. Using the design principles of organic photovoltaics, Das *et al.* circumvented diffusional limitations via a solid state configuration (Au|Ni-NTA|RC|C₆₀|bathocuproine|Ag)³ to obtain a J_{photo} of $\sim 120 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ [33] and a V_{OC} of 0.025 V, albeit under very high light intensity ($\lambda = 808 \text{ nm}$ at $10,000 \text{ mW cm}^{-2}$). Gordiichuk *et al.* [39] explored this solid state configuration further with an ITO|TiO₂|PS-I|PTAA|MoO₃/Al configuration, whereby PS-I was embedded in a PTAA⁴ conductive polymer. This yielded a low J_{SC} $0.3 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ but an unprecedented V_{OC} of 0.76 V thanks to suitable band alignment of selected materials.

Photoactive semiconductor substrates such as titanium dioxide (TiO₂), zinc oxide (ZnO), or hematite (Fe₂O₃) are often used as a substrate upon which the RCs are immobilized. Ocakoglu *et al.* [44] immobilized PS-I multilayers on hematite, obtaining J_{photo} of $\sim 50 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ and a V_{OC} of 0.321 V. Merzhin *et al.* [31] immobilized PS-I on TiO₂ to obtain $362 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$ and a V_{OC} of 0.5 V, with a power conversion efficiency of $\eta = 0.08\%$. Shah *et al.* [25] electro-sprayed PS-I on a TiO₂ substrate to obtain 4.15 mA cm^{-2} , the highest photocurrent to date for any biophotocathode. However, this was obtained in a half-cell configuration under bias utilizing not only mediated but sacrificial electron donors. While these represent the highest performing biophotocathodes, these biohybrid-semiconductor-based systems vastly underperform relative to the current dye-sensitized or perovskite solar cells upon which they are based, which reach photocurrent densities on the order of tens of mA cm^{-2} and V_{OC} 's $\sim 0.6 \text{ V}$, and η approaching 20% (NREL).

Concluding remarks

Perhaps one of the most underemphasized limitations for biophotovoltaic applications is the low durability of photosynthetic pigment-proteins, which in their native environment are constantly being replaced. One of the first targets is to decipher the origin and effect of generated reactive oxygen species, which are deleterious to both the photocurrent magnitude via competing charge transfer pathways, and pigment-protein stability [64]. Hydro-gels retain a large percentage of water (80% w/v) which helps to preserve the natural protein conformation after film-drying [23[•]]. A peptide detergent has also been shown to

stabilize BRCs and PS-I under desiccation in the work of Das *et al.* [33] and Merzhin *et al.* [31], respectively.

While PSII-based systems have obtained some of the highest performing biophotocathodes in terms of photocurrents, the highest turnover numbers per RC (TON) over the entire lifetime of the cell only approach $\sim 16,000 \text{ e}^- \text{ PSII}^{-1}$ [21^{••}]. Conversely, BRC-based systems have exceeded 1 million TON under constant 1-sun illumination on a bare metal electrode [20^{••}], attesting to their relative robustness.

While most biophotocathodes have shown stability on the order of hours, Gizzie *et al.* [35[•]] reported a solid-state Ag/PS-I:polyaniline/TiO₂ with a stability exceeding $3 \times 12 \text{ h}$ alternations of light on and off, while exhibiting a moderate photocurrent density of $72 \mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$. This represents the highest known PS-I stability to date and holds promise for improved PS-I stability via a solid state configuration.

Unfortunately, without high-resolution wavelength-dependent EQE plots, the precise role of PCs on photoactive substrates in studies on TiO₂ are difficult to disentangle, as an intact PS-I spectrum is not always clear [31]. One solution in such instances is to measure the photocurrent under far red ($>600 \text{ nm}$) illumination to isolate the photocurrent contribution from the PCs and not TiO₂ sensitized by chlorophylls, as shown previously [65].

Due to the inherently small cross-section of a single photosynthetic complex coupled with limitations in electron tunneling distances, high surface area electrodes for high loading combined with fast and long-range electronic connectivity are essential for obtaining substantial photocurrent densities. Coupling this with the highly retained potential energy of the RC via tunable redox materials is essential to obtain high power conversion efficiencies. Circumventing the diffusion limited mass transport may be overcome with a solid state configuration, via a second tuned redox polymer or electron acceptor film as shown in Das *et al.* [33], all while preventing looming charge recombination [66[•]]. In contrast with works aiming at improved photocurrent densities, the diagnostic tools of protein-film photoelectrochemistry and other biophysical methods are becoming increasingly important for defining electron transfer pathways. This is key for developing strategies to overcome electron transfer bottlenecks and charge recombination pathways and increasing the onset potentials [29[•],67,43]. For example, Zhang *et al.* [66[•]] demonstrated that a PSII-fullerene matrix led to undesirable short-circuits of the PS-II water-oxidation pathway. Friebe *et al.* [43[•]] improved RC-biophotocathode onset potentials and photocurrents by characterizing and optimizing the cyt *c* electron transfer conditions. Perhaps the most underutilized methods for making bio-

³ C₆₀ = fullerene electron acceptor, bathocuproine/Ag = top electrode.

⁴ PTAA = polytriarylamine polymer, a hole transport layer, MoO₃/Al = a common top electrode in OPVs.

photoelectrodes is the toolkit of protein engineering itself: to modulate the delicate photosynthetic protein into a robust biophotovoltaic protein by optimizing redox midpoint potentials, self-assembly [68], broadened spectral range [40**] and more.

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